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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS, NORTH KOREA

11. Summary: On August 9, Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused their coverage on the sudden resignation Monday of the Minister of Transportation and Communications, and on the controversial highway electronic toll collection system; the aftermath of Taiwan's break in diplomatic ties with Chad; Foreign Minister James Huang's meeting with the leader of Hezbollah in April; and the sea and land warnings for a tropical storm and a typhoon near Taiwan. The pro-status quo "China Times" front-paged a letter by former DPP Chairman Shih Ming-teh to President Chen Shui-bian, urging him to step down. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, on the other hand, ran a banner headline on page two that said "Proactive Move to Cement Foreign Relations; Bian to Visit Palau, Nauru Next Month."

12. In terms of editorials and commentaries, a "Liberty Times" editorial urged the government to freeze all its opening policies toward China in the wake of Taiwan's break in diplomatic ties with Chad. Editorials in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" and "Taiwan News" both said the Chad incident should serve as a wake-up call for Su and his revisionist line. With regard to North Korea, a "Taipei Times" opinion piece urged Taiwan to reassess and strengthen its missile defenses to better address the threats it faces. End summary.

13. Cross-Strait Relations

A) "The Government Should Thoroughly Freeze Its Easing [Regulations] and Opening Policies to China"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 600,000] editorialized (8/9):

"... It is still unknown whether the break in diplomatic ties between Taiwan and Chad will thoroughly wake up the DPP administration, whose words and deeds have been constantly inconsistent, from its illusions about China. But we believe that Taiwan's economy under the DPP's governance has been overly tilted toward China, so tilted that it has threatened our nation's survival. As a result, the severance of diplomatic ties between Taiwan and Chad, to a certain extent, was a result of Taiwan's own making. If Premier Su's 'revisionist line' really intends to safeguard the Taiwan-centered awareness, we suggest that Su completely freeze any opening policies and eased regulations toward China until 2008, and focus on domestic investments and effectively reduce Taiwan's reliance on China. This is the 'Su revisionist line' that Taiwan really needs. ..."

B) "China Fueling Independence Fires"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (8/9):

"On the eve of Premier Su Tseng-chang's departure for Chad, China forced the African nation to sever diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

This is the second time this has happened to Su since becoming premier, and it would be a miracle if he now continued his China-friendly policies. The deterioration of cross-strait relations has not been the result of Taiwan's unwillingness to display goodwill toward China, but rather of China's belligerence. ... The establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Chad should serve as a wake-up call for Su, who may adjust his policies. It has also brought a ray of hope to the cause of Taiwanese independence. The US would do well to retract its approval of high-level cross-strait dialogue. China's hostile actions have scuppered a visit by Chen Yunlin, head of China's Taiwan Affairs Office, which had originally been approved by the government. ...

"China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs may think that it can buy off Taiwan's allies to suppress the fact that Taiwan is a sovereign state, but China's actions are instead driving the Taiwanese government toward a more pragmatic diplomacy that doesn't focus on money or how many diplomatic allies the country has. The Taiwanese public is not blaming the government for losing ties with Chad. Instead, Beijing is providing the strongest support for the opinion that Taiwan should follow its own path."

C) "Taiwan Must Put Quality First in External Policy"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] commented in an editorial (8/9):

"Sunday's breakup with Chad just before the departure of Premier Su Tseng-chang to attend yesterday's third inauguration Chadian

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President Idriss Deby was a shock, but it certainly should not have been a surprise. ... Last but not least, we believe that the government should itself forego any illusion that a line of distinction can be drawn between promotion of cross-strait economic, trade and transportation relations with the PRC and Beijing's incessant assaults on our formal diplomatic relationships and oppression of the substantive participation in international activities by Taiwan NGOs and even individual citizens. Instead, we should make clear to Beijing that such 'pragmatism' has its limits and that Taipei also has a 'red line' beyond which we will not be pushed by Beijing. ..."

14. North Korea

"China Walks Tightrope on North Korea"

Mrinal Menon, a researcher at the Institute for National Policy Research, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (8/9):

"... Regardless of the consequences the recent missile launches have for the Korean Peninsula, the crisis must serve as a wake-up call to Taiwan. In light of the North Korean missile tests and the potential for security crises in Northeast Asia, Taiwan must reassess its own defense capabilities. Taiwan's missile defense posture is woefully under-prepared to tackle the threat it faces from the PRC and North Korea. Well within striking range of North Korean missiles as well as hundreds from the PRC, Taiwan currently lies open and vulnerable. A domestic missile defense posture more in line with that of the US and Japan would better prepare Taiwan for the security landscape of the 21st century. Taiwanese leaders must act on the North Korean crisis and seriously consider updating their missile defense capabilities to better address the threats they face."

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